

Diggings

...from the desk of Jim Fleming

www.biblicalresources.net

Number 3 Issue 1

"Diggings" Subscriptions
c/o Melanie McNutt
6425 Ridge Run Drive
Knoxville, TN 37921
mamcnutt@aol.com

WBC Foundation
(World of the Bible Center)
P.O. Box 3900
LaGrange, GA 30241
Phone: (706) 885-0363

Biblical Resources
Educational Material
P.O. Box 3900
LaGrange, GA 30241
Phone: (706) 885-0363
Fax: (706) 885-0364
www.biblicalresources.net

Biblical Resources
Study Center
c/o Hannaniah Pinto
P.O. Box 3900
LaGrange, GA 30241
biblicalresources@earthlink.net

Jim Fleming
Lecture Bureau
c/o Sally Dowland
212 Knox
Houston, TX 77007
Phone: (404) 202-4485
sdowland@mindspring.com

Explorations in Antiquity Center
130 Gordon Comm. Dr.
LaGrange, GA 30241
(706) 885-0363
www.explorationsinantiquity.net

Guidance in Difficulty, Part 1

Acts of the Apostles

Guidance in Difficulty, a new series in the "Diggings", will be focused upon the Acts of the Apostles and the spread of the early church during difficult times. Acts, thought to have been written by the same author as Luke's Gospel, covers a very instrumental 30 year period, 30-64 AD. Paul comes to faith in 34 AD. Acts provided much encouragement for developing faith communities by giving an historical perspective of events surrounding the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

It's unfortunate but Acts does not have a verse that says: "Note the following principles for Christian guidance." One of the unique things about the scriptures in both Old and New Testaments is that they are not just collections of the

sayings of the prophets or the sayings of Jesus. Most of them are narration. You follow a people, a community of faith, from place A to place B and understand their sense of God with them on their journey.

Part of our maturity in our faith journey is to go from looking for signs and objects around you, I call it oversight circumstances, to relying on insight. The realm of God's work is within – it's an inward journey. How do we evaluate and incorporate internally the things that happen outside of us so that we can move forward on our journey of faith. Early Christians also struggled with these questions. They too needed to change some views as they confronted a changing world scene. They were just beginning their journey on discernment, and the Book of Acts shows us that they had to reflect and reevaluate situations differently with time.

Use Of Interchange

The first nine chapters of Acts are in the literary form called "interchange." An interchange is when an author starts one theme and then begins another before the first theme is finished. The purpose of the interchange is always the same and that is to bring out comparisons and contrasts. By not finishing one theme before another is introduced, the reader (listener) is not as likely to miss the comparison and contrasts. The use of interchange is one of many things that unite Luke-Acts.

Interchange In Luke

1. Promise of John—Promise of Jesus
2. Pregnancy of Elizabeth—Pregnancy of Mary.
3. Birth of John—Birth of Jesus
4. Ministry of John—Ministry of Jesus

As you go back & forth you will notice the similarities and differences.

Interchange In Acts

The Book of Acts, a problem within the church – a problem outside the church. Then back again, a problem within the church – a problem without the church. This happens back and forth 6 times. Not two inward problems without an outer one in between. All faith communities will have problems within and problems without.

The Tragic Suicide of Judas

Jesus chose 12 full-time students to be with him on the road, now there are 11. The 12 were all male, not because of gender insensitivity, but because of an important image. The 12 sons of Jacob became the 12 tribes of Israel and they were all sons. If you have amongst the 12 one of the female full-time students you lose the image of the 12 tribes of Israel

But Judas, tragically, has committed suicide.



Judas' Kiss

Even though his betrayal was more obvious than that of Simon Peter, He is not alone. Judas was not

able to sense that God's grace is greater than the sin of our weakness. Judas, tragically, could not feel that. I have a hunch that for Judas there was another problem - the eleven. Like many in our time, Judas probably did not believe that he could be forgiven by the brothers and sisters in his faith community.

It is not mentioned in John's Gospel, but in Acts and Matthew we clearly know he repented for what he had done which is why some Christian traditions show Judas also with a halo. I wish he could have spoken to Simon Peter. Peter might have been able to help him see that no shadow is too dark for the light of God's grace. The way one forgave someone in Biblical times was by sharing – a covenant meal. Clearly before Judas left the Last Supper Jesus dipped his bread into his own bowl and gave it to Judas. Jesus forgave him. I hope Judas remembered he still had in his stomach the bread of grace from Christ.

Problem Within (Replacing Judas)

Acts 1:17-26 presents the first problem within. With only 11 the whole image is now wrong and because of this, the disciples decide that it was necessary to replace Judas. He had many students who had given their lives to him and served him without being on the road. They considered two men, Joseph called Barsabbas, also known as Justus, and Matthias. Acts 1:24-26, "Then they prayed and said, "Lord, you know everyone's heart. Show us which one of these two you have chosen to take the place of Judas in this ministry/ apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place." They don't wait and quickly we get

this first big decision as a problem within...let's draw lots to replace Judas. Lots fell upon Matthias.



Cow's Knuckles Used to Cast Lots

The problem with this kind of thinking is that it is dependent upon events outside of oneself – “**outsight**” and not upon **insight**. They all wanted a sign. We all do that as well. The older we get in our faith (like the Christians in the Book of Acts) the less we should be tempted to do that. We should value more **insight** and the work of God within. What if the Lord wanted to say, “none of the above?” What if the Lord wanted to say, “Good idea, but the one I have in mind hasn’t gone on the road to Damascus yet.” What if the answer is, “Later?” For you and I, anytime is the right time. But our time is not necessarily in concert with God’s time for accomplishing certain things.

The disciples decided that they must replace Judas right away, the lots come to Matthias. It’s curious, we don’t hear again of Matthias in the Book of Acts. I am sure that even if Matthias was not the Lord’s first choice, he was still blessed. God doesn’t turn away from us when we make bad choices. God works with what God can get. If the

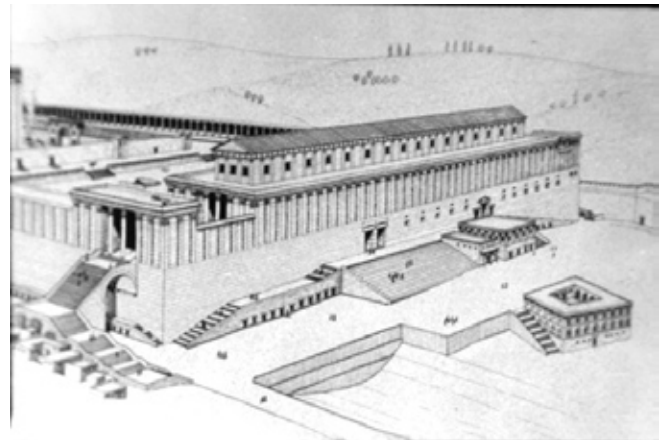
answer was, “wait and reflect.” Then Paul’s coming to faith three or four years later might have allowed Paul to be selected. Paul could have been a more effective choice.

Guidance Point

We ask God to act through circumstances because we have difficulty accepting “wait” as an answer. Guidance in circumstances should be a “yellow light” - wait, observe and reflect. I think that the Lord does jump through hoops at times when we whistle. However, the Lord wishes that we would do it less as we mature in faith. Then we would not ask for “outsight” in order to know.

Problem Without (Boldly Preaching)

Acts 3:1-10 gives us the story of Peter and John who are boldly preaching at the temple.



Jerusalem Temple

On one day a man who has been lame from birth requested alms. Peter said, “I have no silver or gold, but what I have I give you; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk.” While they were preaching in the temple, the Sadducean priests had them arrested. They were taken into custody and held until the next day. The priests didn’t know what to do with them. Many local people had

witnessed the healing of the lame man and they believed that something notable had been done through Peter and John. Acts 4:14-21 informs us that the priests saw the healed man standing before them and that they had nothing to say in opposition. So Peter and John were ordered out of the council while the priests discussed the matter with each other. It was obvious to all who lived in Jerusalem that great things were done through Peter and John. The priests could not deny that, but they did not want the knowledge of the events to spread any further among the people. So the priest ordered Peter and John not to speak or teach in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John, responding to the priests said, “whether it is right in God’s sight to listen to you rather than God, you must judge; for we cannot keep from speaking about what we have seen and heard.” Peter and John were warned again and then let go. The priests could find no way to punish them because all of the people were praising God for what had been done in Jesus’ name. Peter and John continued to preach in the temple and did not let the priests’ warning stop them.

Guidance Point

Remain steadfast in your belief. As did Peter and John, use discernment to direct your actions. Avoid letting only circumstances control and dictate your faith responses. You will then be proactive rather than reactive, which is a much stronger faith position.

Future Issues of the “Diggings”

The next issue will continue in the Acts of the Apostles and will present the next problem within

the church and the next problem without the church.

Note:

Additional Resources and References are available in the Biblical Resources bookstore

1. **Apostles: The Rest of the Story** Cost \$20.00
By Dr. James W. Fleming, Ed.D.
2. **Life of Paul, Mediterranean** Cost \$25.00
Study Cruise
By Dr. James W. Fleming, Ed.D.

These and other resource materials are available at:

Biblical Resources Educational Materials

130 Gordon Commercial Drive

LaGrange, GA 30241

Phone: 706-885-0363

e-mail [www:biblicalresources.net](http://www.biblicalresources.net)